



"Take those off!" I ordered, beside myself at the outrage. But the girl broke into a gale of laughter, and thrust her shackled hands toward me."

# Missing — Roberta Hoyt!

By ADELE LUEHRMANN

Illustration by R. M. Crosby

"She was so young—I couldn't send her into the street again at such an hour. She explained about her trunk; and as for references, I've been renting rooms for four years, and the only references I've ever found worth anything are those a woman carries in her face."

"And on her back, eh? Looking for work in velvet and furs—a likely story!"

"THAT'LL do, Baker," came from the doorway in the authoritative drawl of Hillman, the *News* man in charge of the case. He had left the room with Rosser just before Mrs. Slocum's arrival, and now returned alone.

"We are much obliged to Mrs. Slocum for telling us what she has," he continued. "Smith has just 'phoned that the girl has left the house and that Brady is trailing her. I think we had better go up there at once and look at those things."

He regarded me uncertainly.

"Better take him along, Mr. Hillman," Baker advised, with a scowl at me. "Maybe he'll talk when he sees we've really got her."

Hillman assented with a short nod, and left the room with Mrs. Slocum, leaving Baker to escort me. When the four of us reached the rooming-house in Thirty-eighth Street for which we were bound, we found Smith, the detective to whom Hillman had referred, waiting for us outside. Mrs. Slocum admitted us, and, arranging that Smith was to stand guard below, the rest of us started upstairs—for what purpose, of course, I had no idea. But we had proceeded only a few steps when the telephone bell rang, and, thinking it might be for him, Hillman ordered us down again, while Mrs. Slocum went to a room at the end of the hall to answer it.

Her voice was just audible to us by listening closely, and I suppose it was because we were all straining our ears in that direction that we missed the sounds of footsteps on the stairs. I, at any rate, was not aware of them until the girl suddenly came in sight. Even then, the hall was so dimly lighted that I did not see her

TUESDAY the interview with Rosser appeared in the *Record*, and Robert Hoyt's will become the subject of lively discussion by the press, sealed letter, of course, playing the part. As Tuesday and Wednesday went by without developments of any kind, public interest seemed to increase, it reached its height on the afternoon of Thursday, November 7, when the *Evening News* appeared with the offer of money reward for information that would lead to the discovery of Miss Hoyt's whereabouts, or, failing that, to the discovery and identification of the girl who pawned the jewelry.

That was the beginning of the end. Within an hour I was arrested and led, handcuffed, to the office of the *News*. With characteristic enterprise the team waitress had betrayed me. And I took pleasure in announcing at once that I did not get the reward; for her information led to nothing except my personal comfort. The finding of the locket on me was taken as evidence of the truth of my story, but that was as far as they got. I declined either to deny or affirm her statements. My chances of going to jail were about the same, whether I talked or I not. And what was a night in jail? The next day was the 8th, the day I was waiting for. And I had another reason for waiting. I knew that in the hands of the stage newspaper writer the incident of my meeting and the tea-party afterward would become nothing better than a common pick-up, and I was not going to risk that, not if they gave me the third degree.

XASPERATED by the deadlock occasioned by my refusal to speak, and apparently determined to force my hand, the accuser finally had Mr. Rosser summoned, and his arrival revealed the fact that it was the waitress who had started me on my trail—and that within twenty-four hours of accepting my money.

However, the discovery did not worry me. I knew just how little he knew. The sailing of me had not begun until after my return from Riverton with Rice and

Farnham, and, thanks to Rogers and Mulrooney, my shadow did not follow me to the Hillside Inn. And William Rosser or any one else was welcome to any other information they could get about me.

FOR more than an hour I was plied with questions, and in the end I might have got the third degree. Then, quite unexpectedly to everybody concerned, little Mrs. Slocum put her reluctant finger in the pie.

I did not know how to size her up when they brought her in to look me over. She was middle-aged and shabby, with a sweet, tired face, soft eyes, and a brave mouth. She gave me one fluttering glance and shook her head.

"No, he's not the one; I never saw this young man before," she said, with a sigh that sounded relieved.

"Sure?" snapped Baker, the detective who had conducted my inquisition.

"Oh, yes; the other young man was quite different in appearance. I saw him only for a few minutes under the street lamp, but—"

"You said you saw him after he came into the house!" Baker interrupted.

"No, no—he didn't come in," she corrected hastily. "You must have misunderstood me." He had not misunderstood, as I knew; he was trying to trip her. "This is what I said," she explained earnestly. "It was a little past ten, and I had just turned down the hall light and gone into the parlor to close the windows, which were all open—one of the young ladies had had a caller who smoked—"

"Never mind that," cut in Baker again.

"Well, as I stepped into the room the automobile stopped—not a taxi, but a large, handsome limousine—and they got out. I just saw his face a moment as he turned toward the light in helping her

out. They came up the steps, and I heard the door unlocked; then, after a few words which I did not catch, she said: 'I'm so frightened and nervous. I don't believe I can ever go through with it.' Then he answered something, and she—"

"You're sure you didn't hear what he said?" bullied Baker.

"Oh, yes—a man's voice never carries like a woman's, you know. Then she said: 'Twelve o'clock is bound to come.' Then they both said good night, she came in, and he went off in the car."

"And he was tall and dark, you say?"

"Yes; but he did not look at all like this young man." Here she gave me another fleeting glance. "He was an older man, too."

I HAD been listening intently to this dialogue, waiting for a clue to the identity of the "she" to whom they referred. Evidently they knew no more of the man than I did. But at the description—tall and dark and older—the thought of Winter flashed into my mind. It fitted him, at least. "Twelve o'clock's bound to come," eh? Baker repeated the enigmatic words with a puzzled frown.

"Oh, I do hope she has done nothing wrong," Mrs. Slocum exclaimed, distress in every tone. "I should never have had the heart to come here, only I—I need the money so—with the hard summer I had and now the coal to get in—"

"It was your duty to tell without a reward," Baker reminded her sharply. "You've very likely been harboring a criminal. What kind of a house do you keep, anyway, taking in women at nine o'clock at night without baggage or references? In the habit of doing that?"

The little woman's pale face reddened and she winced at the slur; but she answered with perfect self-control: